

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L HELSINKI 001490

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/NB AND DRL/IL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/18/2014

TAGS: [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [FI](#)

SUBJECT: FINNISH FM TUOMIOJA OPINES ON THE EVILS OF CAPITALISM

Classified By: POLOFF DAVID ALLEN SCHLAEFER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) Finland's Foreign Minister, Erkki Tuomioja (SDP), raised eyebrows by posting an essay to his personal website alleging a "systematic campaign" by the Finnish mainstream media to promote a "rightwing" social and foreign policy agenda. Tuomioja's essay was directed against Finland's leading newspaper, the Helsingin Sanomat (HS), and its Chief Editor, Janne Virkkunen. Virkkunen penned an editorial that appeared in the HS on November 14 in which he lamented the conformity of Finland's "consensus" system of politics and praised a new report by the Center for Finnish Business and Policy Studies (EVA) entitled "Roadmap to Finland's Future Success." The "Roadmap" report advocates labor market reforms and calls for increasing productivity through longer working hours in order to meet the challenges of globalization as well as Finland's ticking demographic time bomb. Tuomioja, in unusually strong language, accused Virkkunen and his newspaper of "feeding porridge to a reluctant nation" and telling workers to "work twice as hard for half their wages in order for the elite to enjoy greater incomes, preferably without the taxman interfering." The website essay sparked the inevitable controversy in the Finnish media. The essay, which originally appeared on the site late on the 15th, disappeared the next day. However, the essay reappeared again, apparently unedited, on the 17th.

A Trial Balloon?  
-----

2. (C) Tuomioja is known for shooting from the hip, although the essay was somewhat shrill even by his standards. If anything, the Helsingin Sanomat is more often left of center on key issues, and the foreign minister's assertion to the contrary is probably seen by most Finns as an exaggeration bordering on the absurd. Moreover, Virkkunen's offending editorial was relatively measured in tone, stating that it was a "healthy sign" that differing opinions on globalization and economic issues were being heard, and that the Social Democrats should be more open to discussion of dissenting views. The editorial also mentioned a report submitted last week by a globalization task force appointed by Prime Minister Vanhanen that offered suggestions similar to those in the EVA "Roadmap."

3. (C) Tuomioja has held forth on his website on all manner of social, cultural, and political issues in the past, and his musings are no strangers to controversy. However, the current piece could be more artifice and design than random reaction. Tuomioja is considering whether to run for the SDP chairmanship next summer. Although Finland's next general election is not until 2007, the Foreign Minister may be contemplating his chances to become prime minister (should the SDP win) or to run for President (should Tarja Halonen decline to run again). Tuomioja and Halonen are the leaders of the SDP's left wing. A recent poll found that Tuomioja was the least popular with SDP party members of the major contenders for the SDP chair; however, the same poll found that Tuomioja was the most popular contender with the public at large. The odd essay might be a trial balloon of sorts, or an attempt to gain yet more popular support so as to be able to present himself to the SDP braintrust next summer as "the man who can win back the prime ministership." Finland is currently experiencing a major transportation workers strike as a dispute over the hiring of part-time bus drivers has spread, and Tuomioja's populist rhetoric could be designed to tap into what he perceived to be public anger over greedy employers exploiting average Finns. If so, judging from the initial public reaction to the essay (and the strike), he may have overreached.

MACK